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ABSTRACT

This study explored the interaction of multiracial identity development and college campus contexts in the experience of 24 biracial or multiracial college students attending three institutions an Ivy League university, a Catholic university, and a liberal arts college. The study applied qualitative grounded theory as framed by postmodern racial identity theory. Individual interviews were held with all participants; participants provided written responses to a questionnaire; focus groups were conducted with three to four students on each campus; and observational field notes and archival data for each campus were collected and analyzed. The study identified two main themes: the notion of space and the impact of peer culture. Analysis indicated two types of affiliative behavior ("nomads" and "nesters") and five patterns of occupying identity-based space on campus: (1) students chose one existing monoracial category; (2) students moved between existing monoracial categories; (3) students created a new "multiracial" category; (4) students opted out completely by deconstructing the category of race or choosing not to identify with any race; and (5) students moved between or among the above options. The major determinants of students' identity choices were campus racial demographics and peer culture. (Contains 44 references.)

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ED 427 602

CHECK ALL THAT APPLY: THE EXPERIENCE OF BIRACIAL AND MULTIRACIAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

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This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held in Miami, Florida, November 5-8, 1998. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Despite significant and increasing numbers of biracial and multiracial[1] students, almost nothing is known about their development and interactions in the college environment. This study explores the interaction of multiracial identity development and campus contexts through qualitative grounded theory framed by postmodern racial identity theory. Among twenty-four students who identified as biracial or multiracial students, two types of affiliative behavior (Nomads and Nesters) and five patterns of occupying identity-based space on campus prevailed. The major determinants of students' identity choices were campus racial demographics and peer culture. The results of this study provide insight into the experience of multiracial students and can be used as a model to explore multiracial students' lives at other institutions, as well as to explore other areas of socially constructed identity (gender, sexuality, class) on campus. The findings also raise complicated questions about how we use racial categories in higher education and how multiracial people fit, or do not fit, into those categories.

In this paper, I will first establish a context in the current literature on multiracial identity development and college student development. Then I will present the methodology and analytic framework of the study. I will present major findings related to how students gave meaning to public and private identity-based spaces on campus, and finally I will discuss some implications for practice in higher education.

Multiracial identity development in the college environment

Multiracial students are thought to comprise one to two percent of the college population and their numbers are growing (Schmidt, 1997), but their experience is not reflected in either the student development literature or the literature on multiracial identity development. College offers a variety of settings in which students explore identity: peer cultures, academic work, campus activities, etc. (Astin, 1984; Chickering & Reiser, 1993; Roark, 1989), but it has not been known whether or how the college environment facilitates or inhibits the identity development of young people whose parents are of different federally-defined races[2]. Current theories of multiracial

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[1]Throughout this paper, I will use the words biracial, multiracial, mixed race, interracial and multiple heritage interchangeably. In order to create parity between mono- and multiracial descriptors, I have decided not to capitalize the names of racial categories (i.e. black, white, asian) except when a word relates specifically to a nation of origin (i.e. Samoan, Chinese). There is not general agreement in the multiracial literature as to terminology or conventions of capitalizing racial designators, and my choices are designed to minimize racial categories as immutable entities.

[2]According to the Office of Management and Budget Directive 15 (1997), the federal government defines five racial categories as: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; White. In addition, the government recognizes one ethnicity: Hispanic or Latino. Participants in this study were multiracial (parents from more than one federal racial designation, such as white and asian) rather than multiethnic (parents from more than one ethnicity, such as Korean-Japanese).

identity development take a postmodern perspective on race as a social construction (Chandler, 1997; Root, 1996), and some students are well-versed in both postmodern and identity development theory (Renn, 1997). These students live, though, on campuses that are highly modernist in structure and outlook (Bloland, 1995; Tierney, 1993), where peer culture regulates group membership and status.

This study has special relevance to higher education at a time when multiraciality has become a matter of political and popular interest. A political movement of mixed race people emerged in the last decade and demanded changes in data collection by racial group membership on the United States Census in the year 2000 (Schnaiberg, 1997; Yemma, 1997). For the first time, census respondents will be offered the option of selecting one or more racial categories (Baron, 1998; Office of Management and Budget, 1997).

Prior to the October 1997 change in the Census guidelines, studies showed that less than two percent of the population claimed to belong to more than one of the government's existing racial categories (Schmidt, 1997). While this number is not very large compared to the general population, a change in how these individuals indicated their racial group categorization on the census could have a significant influence on racial group statistics used to enforce various civil-rights laws (Baron, 1998; White, 1997). In the current battle over access, equity, and affirmative action policy in higher education, racial statistics matter. At present there is no accurate count of multiracial students and no systems in place to deal with the new check-as-many-as-apply option.

This study does not attempt to develop such a system, but it begins to explore how multiracial students might see themselves in the context of higher education. College students live within but slightly separated from the larger society, and therefore are influenced by both national social movements and campus-based peer cultures and activities. While raising larger questions about the use of racial categories in higher education, this study focuses on how campus peer culture influences the ways in which multiracial students make meaning of their racial identity in college.

Identity development is a central tenet of many student development theories (see Chickering & Reiser, 1993). Both lifespan and student development theory generally include identity development as a central task of traditional age (18-22 years old) collegians (Chickering & Havighurst, 1981; Erikson, 1968). The concept of identity development is understood generally to be achieving "that solid sense of self that assumes form as [other] developmental tasks ... are undertaken with some success, and which ... provides a framework for interpersonal relationships, purposes, and integrity" (Chickering & Reiser, 1993, p. 80). College students engage in a process of examining the systems of values and ethics taught to them by family and peers, creating new systems of beliefs and behaviors to match their self-definitions and lifestyles.

They emerge from college with an identity forged in the academic and peer culture of the campus. This sense of self includes conceptions of body and appearance, as well as clarification of gender, sexual and racial identity (Chickering & Reiser, 1993).

As postmodernism increasingly influences curricula and campus culture, the notion of identity development becomes more complicated. Indeed, Tierney (1993) has written that a postmodern society will not even have a unitary, consensual definition of identity or identity formation. Kenneth Gergen proposed that "as belief in essential selves erodes, awareness expands of the ways in which personal identity can be created and re-created in relationships" (1991, p. 146). His scheme of development traced an individual from a modern self-conception of essential individual identity through a series of changes in self-perspective, ending with the postmodern "relational self ... in which it is relationship that constructs the self" (p. 147). Tierney put the issue in an organizational light as well, arguing that identity is not fixed, that it depends on time and context, and that individuals are "constantly redescribed by institutional and ideological mechanisms of power" (p. 63).

When we challenge traditional definitions of the self as something that can be discovered and identified, rather than continually constructed in relationships, existing theories of student development are inadequate to describe what is happening while young people are at college. Chickering & Reiser's (1993) assertion that identity formation precedes the development of mature interpersonal relationships makes little sense if identity formation occurs through engagement in those very relationships, as Gergen (1991) and Tierney (1993) believed. Astin's (1984) and Roark's (1989) theories of involvement and challenge/support hold true in a postmodern view of student development, but require a shift in emphasis from the individuals operating in a college environment to their relationships within that setting. The field of student development is in need of an overarching theory that takes into account the construction of various aspects of identity in the college context. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1993) created such a unifying theory for the field of cognitive development, and his ecology model formed a basis for organizing data from this study in light of both traditional and postmodern theories of racial identity development.

Whatever perspective student development theorists adopt, we live in a modernist society where race is considered a "master status, an identity that overrides all others in others' judgments of the self" (Stephan, 1992, p. 51). Since identity is either formed through or literally created in social interactions (the modern and postmodern theories, respectively), a sense of racial identity is part of understanding oneself on campus and in society as a whole (Chickering & Reiser, 1993; Stephan, 1992; Williams, 1996). Therefore, in either a traditional or postmodern view of student development, racial identity formation is an important element of identity development.

Several models of racial identity formation have been created and applied to college students. These models rely on a progression from conformity with majority (white) culture through stages of dissonance and resistance to an immersion in minority culture, ending with an

integration of racial identity with other aspects of the person's self-definition (Atkinson, Morten & Sue, 1979; Cross, 1991, 1995; Helms, 1990, 1995). In each model, the opportunity to immerse oneself in minority culture is a critical element in developing self-confidence and pride. For monoracial students of color these models seem to work well, describing familiar situations on college campuses, where self-defined groups of black, asian, native american, and latina/o students create communities that support students through the first several stages of racial identity formation (though generally not to the endpoint of integration of racial identity).

The racial identity models do not necessarily address the needs of mixed race students, who cannot engage entirely in an immersion in one of their component cultures without putting aside, at least for that time, other aspects of their heritage (Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990; Kerwin-Ponterotto, 1995). Furthermore, even when these students do choose to affiliate with monoracial student cultures, they are often rejected if they express their multiraciality (Daniel, 1992; Renn, 1997; Yemma, 1997). The communities of like-others that support the development of many students of color are not generally available to assist multiracial students in exploring their racial identities (Renn, 1997; Williams, Nakashima, Kich & Daniel, 1996). Accordingly, models of multiracial identity formation generally do not include a stage of immersion in a monoracial minority culture.

Early models of biracial identity development (Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990) were stage-based and modernist in orientation, but more recent theories take a postmodern approach. Multiraciality is seen as a state of "positive alterity" (Weisman, 1996) or "positive marginality" (Daniel, 1996) in which the goal of multiracial identity formation is an individual's ability to engage in a variety of "border crossings" (Giroux, 1992) between and among social contexts defined by race and ethnicity (Root, 1990, 1996). Maria Root (1996) proposed a theory of identity formation that does not depend on an orderly progression through developmental stages, but rather relies on an individual's ability to be comfortable with self-definition in, across, and/or in between categories. The notion of racial borderlands or border zones (Anzaldua, 1987; Giroux, 1992; Root, 1990, 1996; Zack 1995) sets the stage for the dissolution of race as an impermeable, essential category.

Neither student development theory nor multiracial identity development theory addresses how multiracial young people make sense of multiracial identity in the context of the college environment. A pilot study (Renn, 1997) showed that mixed race students at one college faced the paradox of acknowledging the social construction of race (and wished to dismantle it as such) while also acknowledging the need to create and maintain a self-identified multiracial community on campus. Armed with postmodern theory, but living in a racialized society, they simultaneously rejected race as a valid construction and valorized it through their campus involvement, academic work, and personal identification. Based on that research I wanted to explore three major sites of identity formation (peer culture, involvement in activities, and academic work) to learn more about how students understood and described their multiracial identity in the context of higher education.

Research methods

There were 24 participants in this study, eight from each of three undergraduate-focused institutions: Carberry, an Ivy League university; Ignacio, a Catholic university; and Woolley, a liberal arts college (all names are pseudonyms). All institutions were coeducational and drew applicants from a national pool, though students from the New England states and New York were over-represented on each campus. Woolley was entirely residential and Carberry and Ignacio were primarily residential. These institutions resembled one another in several campus characteristics (coeducational, undergraduate focus, residential, geographic region, tuition, range of test scores) while differing in size, selectivity, and racial diversity.

Table 1. Institutional summaries (all data are for 1997-1998)

School	No. of under-grads	US cit. students of color	Int'l stud.	Tuition	Middle 50% SAT	Admit rate	First-year retention/ graduation
Carberry	5500	27%	6%	$23,124	1280-1480	19%	96%, 93%
Ignacio	9000	16%	3%	$20,292	1180-1360	41%	94%, 88%
Woolley	1400	12%	3%	$20,820	1070-1250	75%	84%, 72%

Of the 24 participants, four had two parents of color and twenty had one white parent and one parent of color. There were four first-years, eight sophomores, four juniors, and eight seniors. Fifteen women and nine men participated, divided evenly among the institutions. I recruited participants through flyers, email lists, targeted mailings (at Woolley), and snowball sampling. For more information about participants, see participant summary table on page 6.

There were four main components to this study: individual interviews with all participants, written responses by participants, a focus group of 3-4 students per campus, and observations of/archival data about each campus vis-à-vis multiracial issues. Interviews provided an opportunity for individual students to respond in depth to questions about their college experiences and how they made sense of their multiraciality in the college setting. Written responses gave students a chance to reflect more deeply, in their own time and fashion, on how they made meaning of identity development. The focus groups accomplished several goals. They gave me an opportunity to watch how multiracial students interacted when asked to discuss their identity development; they provided students an opportunity to interact with their multiracial peers; they assisted in triangulating data; and they served as member checks. The archival research and observations provided background information about each campus milieu, particularly as it pertained to multiracial issues. The data for this study therefore consisted of audio tapes, transcripts, and field notes from the interviews and focus groups, the students' written responses, archival information and field notes from campus observations, and information gathered during member checks.

Table 2. Participant summary

Name[3]	College	Year	Self-description; father / mother[4]
Alexandra	Ignacio	junior	multiracial; hispanic & Chinese/native am.
Audrey	Woolley	sophomore	multiracial; Scottish, English/Irish, African, Chinese
BJ (female)	Ignacio	first-year	multiracial; african-american/Filipino (plus white stepfather)
Dan	Carberry	sophomore	biracial asian american or biracial Chinese-American; Italian/Chinese (raised with white stepmother)
Dave	Woolley	senior	multiracial; Iranian/white American
David	Carberry	senior	biracial or hapa yonsei[5]; third gen. French-Irish/third generation Japanese-American
Dee Dee	Carberry	senior	black; african american/South Asian
Elektra	Ignacio	senior	half asian or half; white/Chinese
Elizabeth	Woolley	first-year	biracial; Japanese-American/white
Erika	Woolley	first-year	half American, half Japanese, or international; Japanese/American
Fred	Ignacio	senior	half-Japanese; English, Irish, Scottish/ 2nd gen. Japanese-American
Jazz (female)	Woolley	sophomore	multicultural; Egyptian or Nubian/white
Jeff	Carberry	junior	hapa, biracial, or multiracial; 2nd gen. Japanese-American/European-American (French, German, Spanish)
Jennifer	Ignacio	senior	half white, half Filipino; Filipino/white
Julia	Carberry	sophomore	biracial; white/black
Kayla	Carberry	junior	mixed race, mixed, or multiracial; Hungarian Jew/Hindu Indian
Kira	Carberry	sophomore	biracial; white/Filipina
Marisa	Woolley	senior	Jamaican, multiracial, or black; Indian/Afro-Caribbean & white
Mike	Woolley	sophomore	black; black/Puerto Rican
Phil	Ignacio	first-year	mixed, biracial, or half asian; German, Austrian, Hungarian/Chinese
Sapo	Woolley	sophomore	Mexican-American; Mexican/Irish
Sina	Carberry	junior	biracial; white/Samoan, of Chinese descent
Summer	Ignacio	senior	half asian; Latvian Jewish/Korean
Vincent	Ignacio	sophomore	multiple heritage or international; Swiss/Chinese

[3]All names are pseudonyms selected by participants.

[4]Self-descriptors and descriptions of parents' heritage are those used by students in interviews, written responses, and focus groups.

[5]"hapa" is the Hawai'ian word for "half," often used as shorthand to mean mixed race asian americans; "yonsei" is the Japanese word indicating fourth-generation Japanese-American

The interpretive framework for this study included the constant comparative method (Bogdan & Biklin, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the generation of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Strauss & Corbin (1994) consider grounded theory methodology appropriate for generating theory from data or for elaborating and modifying existing data, which was the purpose of this study. Furthermore, because grounded theory relies on the researcher's interpretation of data but also includes the perspectives and voices of the participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), it is a compelling methodology for a study that explores participants' meaning-making.

I began data analysis with line-by-line coding of transcripts of individual interviews. Based on the pilot, I had anticipated that codes relating to academic work, peer culture, involvement in activities, and identity development would emerge. In addition, I developed codes relating to family, international experience, race, culture, and personal development. I was concerned about how my identity as a monoracial white person might influence my data coding and analysis. I therefore enlisted a biracial colleague and a multiracial Carberry student to code two transcripts each. They independently agreed with the major codes, and each also made suggestions for modifying the subcodes slightly.

To assist in constant comparative analysis, I used HyperResearch to code line by line and to build codes and themes throughout the course of data collection. I also relied on Miles & Huberman's (1994) description of cross-case displays to organize and manage my data. I performed inductive analysis of data from interviews, responses, and field notes as the study progressed, and this analysis formed the basis for the summaries presented in the focus groups/member checks. When the data from the focus groups/member checks was added to the total, I completed coding and analysis using HyperResearch.

Findings

Two main themes emerged from the data: the notion of space and the impact of peer culture. By space, I mean both the public spaces of social groups, formal student organizations, and physical space in which students felt like they belonged as well as the private space of students' reflection and intimate conversations about who they were and who they wanted to become. By peer culture, I mean the forces, often tacit, that shape life on campus in terms of group membership, acceptable discourse, and desirable behaviors. On these three campuses, peer culture regulated the flow of students between and among public spaces on campus, and the experience of fitting into public spaces impacted how students privately constructed their identities. In this paper I will focus primarily on how students made meaning of identity-based space on campus.

Like their monoracial peers, multiracial students were going about the business of developing meaningful definitions of who they were and who they wanted to become. They were doing the work of identity development on campuses not set up to accommodate those who do not

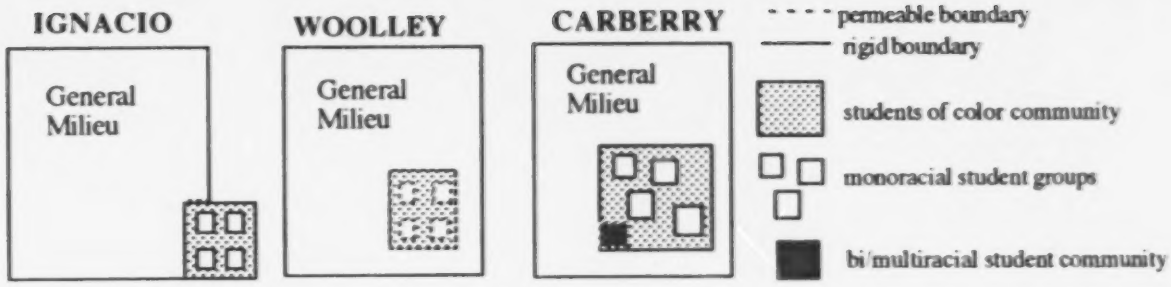
fit into previously defined categories. In doing so, they gave meaning and importance to the idea of having a space in which to belong. In this section, I will describe the three sites and the climate for multiracial students on each campus. Then I will discuss four critical elements in the students' story about space: the meaning of space, the importance of having a space, the kinds of spaces these students occupied on campus, and the institutional conditions that promoted or inhibited multiracial students' freedom in selecting from among the spaces available on their campus.

Campus portraits

Each campus had its own climate for students of color in general and for multiracial students in particular. Factors that contributed to the overall climate were the relationship between the community of students of color and the overall student milieu, the size of the population of students of color and the permeability of boundaries around various student communities. Participants described the different communities on campus, how they related to one another, and the ease with which students could move from one group to another. The community of students of color was located either within the broader campus culture or was outside the mainstream. At only one institution–Carberry–was there a formal multiracial student community, consisting of a student group (called "Spectrum" in this paper), representation on various committees within the community of students of color, and activities planned for and by multiracial students.

Furthermore, the boundary between the community of students of color and the general milieu was either permeable, allowing students to move fluidly from one group to another, or it was rigid, preventing easy movement. Within the community of color, a similar phenomenon occurred; groups based on monoracial identity (black students association, asian student caucus, etc.) maintained borders of varying degrees of permeability. These borders kept cultural outsiders from entering. For example, many participants who called themselves "half-asian/black/etc." came to college in search of cultural knowledge but found themselves unwelcome in groups of peers who were "whole" ethnicities. The locations and boundaries of the communities at each site are represented in Figure 1 on the next page.

Figure 1. Campus portraits



Historically, the community of politically active students of color at Carberry was known as the Third World community. While any non-white student was considered a student of color, only those who actively participated in activities of the monoracial student clubs (like the Organization of United African People, the Filipino Alliance, or Native Americans at [Carberry]) or the university-sponsored Third World Center (a freestanding administrative building with its own professional staff) were considered "Third World students." At Ignacio, the acronym "AHANA" (African, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American) was assigned by the administration and had become the campus shorthand for both students of color and the identified community of students active in organizations for students of color. Although they described interactions among students and student organizations in ways that indicated there was a sense of community among students of color, participants from Woolley used no specific word or phrase to denote it. Carberry and Ignacio students had well-defined and purposefully named communities, while Woolley students reflected the more fluid nature of their campus climate with a less boundaried and unnamed community of students of color.

No matter which campus climate they lived in, students belonged to one of two affiliative categories: those who established themselves within one or two groups on campus (whom I call the Nesters) and those who flowed across group boundaries to affiliate with multiple groups (the Nomads). These typologies were derived not only from students' racial identity affiliations, but also from their general patterns of associations on campus. For example, some students moved easily from their sports team to a musical group to the "computer nerds," while some clustered with one group of friends from their residence hall or academic program. The cohorts were almost evenly divided between Nomads and Nesters at Ignacio and Carberry, but at Woolley, where the culture supported more flow among student affiliations, all of the students were Nomads.

Multiracial students were looking for space to belong on campuses designed to accommodate monoracial individuals. At Ignacio they felt compelled to choose between the community of color and the mainstream (white) cultural space; at Woolley they found space in the cross-cultural community of students of color, but also felt comfortable moving in and out of other

communities; at Carberry they created their own multiracial space as a base from which to venture into other cultural spaces. Whether students were Nomads or Nesters, they worked within their particular campus contexts to find places they could be themselves. In the next four sections I will discuss how students defined spaces on campus, the importance they placed on finding spaces to fit in, the actual identity-based spaces they chose to occupy, and the institutional conditions that influenced those choices.

The meaning of space

Across the three campuses, students spoke of finding space–both physical and psychological–to fit in. Space was both a public and a private notion. Students talked about having spaces on campus with others who shared their interests. These were the public spaces of residence halls, student organizations, classrooms or social events, places where peer culture was enacted. Students also talked about having space to define their own identities. These were the private spaces created as individuals sorted through the meanings of peer culture, family background, and personally-held notions of culture, race and self. Private spaces took the form of individuals' reflection on identity, whether that reflection occurred through journal writing, academic projects, or conversations with trusted others. What went on in public spaces shaped students' sense-making in private spaces, but students also brought their privately held ideas about race, culture and identity into the public spaces on campus. They wrote about issues of race for campus newspapers, they spoke up at forums on interracial dating, and they created theater pieces expressing their multiracial identities. This public-private dichotomy reflected the literature on biracial identity development (Brown, 1995; Root, 1990) and formed a dialectic in which identity was questioned and shaped.

The construction of public space was sometimes obvious and at other times more subtle. Usually definitions of group space were unspoken, though occasionally the boundaries were clearly articulated. The borders were made visible when students tried to enter a space, often when they were new to a campus community. Some borders were more permeable than others, allowing people to move easily in and out of a space, rather than rigid boundaries. The three main elements of public space-making were shared culture, physical appearance, and participation in legitimizing activities.

Students gave numerous examples of times when they felt like they fit in with a group because they held shared cultural knowledge. Generally accumulated through family and home communities before coming to college, knowledge of the language, food, religion, customs, and values of a culture enabled students to participate, for example, in the Filipino Society at Ignacio, the Middle Eastern Club at Carberry, or the Latino Student Association at Woolley.

A cultural knowledge deficit was just as powerful in keeping a student out of a certain space. This phenomenon was especially true at Carberry, where the various ethnic groups within

the Third World community had the critical mass and political will to demarcate rigid boundaries, but it existed at the other schools as well. Though Dan chose Carberry in part because he could explore his Chinese heritage there, he felt like he lacked the cultural knowledge required to participate in activities of the Chinese Student Association. Even as she risked hurting her white father to learn her mother's native language, Tagalog, Kira felt as though her legitimacy among Filipino students was challenged. Elektra avoided the group for Chinese students at Ignacio because she lacked cultural knowledge and felt excluded by students who were "whole Chinese."

Another major element in maintaining boundaries was a student's physical appearance. In a society where race is a "master status" (Stephan, 1992) and where others' initial impression of one's race is generally based on appearance, physical appearance was an important determining factor in inclusion or exclusion. The most striking example of appearance as a boundary-setting device occurred at Woolley when a member of the Black Student Association looked around the room to determine who "looked black enough to belong." Marisa, a light-skinned Jamaican woman of mixed heritage passed his test for blackness, but was left feeling "singled out." She wondered what would have happened had she had the same heritage but lighter skin. Students gave many more subtle examples, often telling stories about times when they had entered a meeting of a group of monoracial students of color and people had looked at them questioningly, as Jennifer put it, as if to say, "Are you sure you belong here?"

As much as appearances could mark someone as not belonging in a particular monoracial group, most students also looked "ethnic" enough to be perceived as not white. This perception created space for them to belong to a general community of students of color on any of the campuses. They knew they were accepted as such when they were invited to and welcomed at activities of different groups and when their arrival at events was not met with any unusual scrutiny by peers.

A few of the students looked sufficiently white that people did not know they were multiracial unless the student told them. Two of Fred's friends made a bet about his heritage, and Dan was sometimes mistaken for a white Italian man. In these cases, students encountered some resistance in proving their legitimacy in the community of color but were able to blend into the mainstream white campus culture. The desirability of "passing" as white, however, varied across the participants, so this easy-blending characteristic was experienced differently by different students. Unfortunately, the way two students knew they were fully accepted into mainstream culture was when white students felt comfortable making racist remarks or jokes in their presence. Another unwelcome signifier of their acceptance into white campus culture was when a white person, usually a friend, denied the cultural heritage of a multiracial student by saying something like, "I don't even think of you as black/latino/asian."

The focus group conducted at Carberry raised the issue of appearance as a gendered factor. They concluded that although both multiracial men and women were subjected to exotification by

peers, women experienced the effects more deeply. Citing examples in the media and in advertising campaigns, students noted how the idea of the "exotic other"–often a woman whose appearance was racially ambiguous–was gaining ground in the ongoing commodification of women's bodies. Students in the group also agreed that the differential impact of exotification caused a greater number of women to be involved in identity-based organizations like Spectrum and to respond more readily to opportunities (such as this study) to discuss issues of identity. According to these students, appearance played a key role in the creation and maintenance of the borders of public space both on and off campus.

The final element in the definition of space was participation in legitimizing activities. Through participation in certain clubs or classes on each campus, students negotiated the boundaries of various communities. Involvement in campus media at each institution was a means to establish borders. Students who fit into the Third World community at Carberry regularly wrote Opinions pieces or Letters to the Editor for the daily newspaper in response to incidents of racism on campus. The weekly paper at Ignacio was a venue for AHANA students to communicate their concerns, and the biweekly Woolley paper became a vehicle for Marisa to create space for students of color as she began to report on the events and activities of that community. Students who wrote for campus papers took on the public role of representing students of color, so in addition to establishing themselves as insiders in the pervasive campus dialogue on race, they influenced the formation of peer culture and definitions of who belonged in what spaces on campus.

Participation in a variety of other activities also delineated boundaries of student communities. At Woolley, where the community of students of color was located within the broader campus culture, participation in groups of students of color or the Intercultural Board marked students as insiders. Other student cultures were marked by membership on athletic teams, musical groups, or student government. None of the Woolley students said that membership in one group prevented membership in another, indicating that campus boundaries were permeable. All of the Woolley students fell into the Nomad category, belonging to more than one community or friendship group on campus and moving among different activities. So although participation in activities could add legitimacy to a student's claim of identity, it did not prevent him or her from engaging in other identity-based spaces as it did on the other two campuses.

At Ignacio, however, participation in AHANA activities marked a student as a member of the separate AHANA community, separate from the mainstream student culture. Students of color could choose whether or not to join these activities and were not compelled to do so, but if they joined the ethnic student groups they were generally allied with the AHANA social and political structure. Because the mainstream culture did not tolerate open discussion of racial issues, an AHANA-identified student who wanted to fit into the mainstream culture would be required to leave that AHANA identity outside. Membership in AHANA groups marked her or him as an outsider to the everyday world of Ignacio's white, "jock-y" student culture. Some of the students

in the study had friendship groups in the mainstream culture and in the AHANA culture, but they did not feel as though they could bring these groups together. Vincent described one night when he wanted to do something with two friends from the different campus cultures. He decided not to try to bring them together because, "It's not like something bad is going to come out of it, it's just that it's very awkward."

Carberry students spoke the most about issues of legitimacy and the ways in which different activities marked one as an authentic member of the Third World community or individual cultural groups. Attending the pre-orientation for students of color was a key requirement for being an insider, according to Kira, who did not attend and felt like she had had to "prove herself in the Third World community" ever since. Students who had attended talked about the ways in which they felt included by Third World students from the start of their time at Carberry.

Another activity that marked students as insiders was participation as Minority Peer Counselors in the residence halls. Selected by other Third World students, these students were seen as key cultural gatekeepers, responsible for transmitting Third World culture and history to first-year students. Dan and Jeff felt that their participation in the peer counseling program increased their acceptance in the Third World community. There was also an ethos of coalition-building and cross-cultural support in the Third World culture at Carberry, and through supporting other groups' activities, students could mark themselves as insiders in the Third World community.

Participation in groups of certain ethnicities was a way to attain insider status, but not all multiracial students felt like they had access to these groups. As a member of the black student group on campus, Dee Dee felt like she fit in. Julia, however, did not feel like she fit into the same organization and was left outside. There were two key determinants of insider/outsider status: first, a student's level of cultural knowledge and second, her willingness to leave her bi- or multiracial identity outside the monoracial group space. Once they got inside the space, students occasionally felt their legitimacy was challenged, but for the most part, participating in a monoracial student organization was a way to signal that they belonged with that group.

It was also possible to join activities that marked students as outsiders to the Third World community or to particular organizations in it. Jeff pledged a predominantly white fraternity, a move that put his insider status in the Third World community at risk. Even joining Spectrum, the group for multiracial students, marked students as not fitting in. In the focus group at Carberry, participants strongly agreed that belonging to or taking a leadership role in Spectrum was considered antithetical to fully belonging to the black student organization or to one of the nationality-specific asian student groups (Korean Students Association, Japan Club, etc.). They felt that they could fit into monoracial groups only if they did not claim membership in Spectrum or otherwise assert their multiple-heritage background.

On the other hand, Spectrum created a new space in which students could find a sense of belonging. Repeatedly, participants told stories of feeling comfortable, of fitting in, or of finding a space in Spectrum. Unlike other organizations in the Third World community, Spectrum was a space where students could identify however they chose. Dan said that at the beginning of a Spectrum meeting, students went around the circle introducing themselves by name and how they identified, "and it was 'biracial,' 'multiracial,' 'black,' 'asian,' whatever." All were welcome in the space.

The annual Multiracial Heritage Week created another space for students to belong. Being selected as a student speaker or working to plan the week were ways students found to fit in and contribute to the multiracial community on campus. Kayla wrote, directed, and participated in a theater piece based on multiracial identity. David was a speaker his first year. Jeff coordinated the week one year, and Julia coordinated it another. All of these involvements helped students maintain their own space on campus. They created their own student culture, with a history, activities, and traditions. Paradoxically, these were the same students who believed strongly that racial categories were socially constructed and were convinced of the importance of eliminating social categories based on race. In order to operate in a racialized campus climate with rigid boundaries around racial groups, they created their own space in the Third World community and patterned its activities after traditions in the black, latino, and asian communities.

Through common cultural knowledge, similar physical appearance, shared humor, and group involvements, peer culture on each campus defined who could occupy which public spaces. The overall racial climate on campus determined the permeability or rigidity of the boundaries around various spaces. The maintenance of borders was performed by those already in groups, as in the case of the black student assessing the appearance of group members, or those outside of them, as in the situation at Ignacio where white students avoided events in the AHANA community. Often, the borders were reinforced by multiracial students themselves, who avoided situations like the monoracial student groups at Carberry or Ignacio, where they feared–often based on prior experience–that their legitimacy would be challenged. In the next two sections I will discuss why belonging to a space was important to participants and which identity-based spaces these students occupied on their campuses.

The importance of having a space

Both student development and racial identity development literature discuss the importance to people of feeling like they fit in, that they belong, and that they have space (Chickering & Associates, 1981; Daniel, 1996; Root, 1990; Weisman, 1996). Across sites, participants in this study emphasized this need, though they talked about it in different ways. Access to and inclusion in public space created opportunities to explore or to validate privately-held ideas about identity. In their stories about life before and during college, students described times when they felt like they

belonged to a group, family or community, but they also described times when they felt left out or were unable to find a place to fit in. In this section I will discuss the ideas students held about the importance of having a space as well as the theoretical basis for the importance of fitting into public space.

Importance of space to students

Several students selected their colleges because they believed they could find certain kinds of community spaces there. For example, Dan wanted to explore his Chinese heritage and selected Carberry in part because it had an active community of asian students. Kayla was looking for people who would be a "good influence" on her. Phil chose to live on the multicultural floor at Ignacio because he wanted to be part of a diverse residential floor dedicated to exploration of pluralism. Vincent chose Ignacio because of its location in a city with a large international student community. Dave, Mike, Jazz, Erika, and Elizabeth wanted to go to Woolley because it offered a small, tight-knit college community. For these students and several others, the desire to find a place to belong was critical in their decision to attend a particular institution.

Once they arrived on campus, however, their experiences of finding that space differed greatly. Five Ignacio students and four from Woolley seriously considered transferring after their first year. At institutions with retention rates over 80%, the fact that one-half of the Woolley students and nearly two-thirds of the Ignacio students considered transferring stood out. Three of the nine said that their school was not where they had hoped to attend college, but had been the best (or only) option available after they were rejected from more appealing institutions. Some of their dissatisfaction with their college could be attributed to that factor, but all nine would-be transfers discussed race or campus race relations as an aspect of their dissatisfaction.

Alexandra talked about her desire to be in a more diverse community than the one she found at Ignacio. She disliked the way campus culture split students into "AHANA and everyone else." She decided to stay for academic reasons, but she said:

> Someone once described it as the place you go when you want to be around people who are like you. I felt that was accurate. You just have to be, especially if you're not part of the majority, you just have to be more aware of it and just to apply yourself and get the most out of it, I think.

Because the campus climate around issues of race was so highly segregated as compared to her high school experience, Elektra in her first year "hated Ignacio so much that [she] wanted to leave and never come back."

Marisa cited the small size of the community of color at Woolley as a reason for wanting to leave and noted that several of her friends did transfer, further reducing the size of the community. Positive experiences with faculty convinced her to stay. One of the students who had considered transferring from Woolley captured the thoughts of others:

> I never really feel like I completely belong. Sometimes I just have to put myself in the mentality that you're just here to go to school and don't worry about it. I don't feel like it's my school, just like how I couldn't call it my high school. I'm just a student and I really don't have any connections outside of academics with the school.

Other students had very different initial experiences of college, notably those who attended the pre-orientation for students of color at Carberry. Those six students were struck immediately by the size and diversity of the Third World community there, and several remarked that it was their first opportunity to identify with a group of bi- or multiracial people. Their space on campus was made ahead of time and they received formal invitations into it from the Dean of the College. At the pre-orientation David was glad he found "so many people are out there just to help [him] feel comfortable."

At Ignacio, Fred felt comfortable from the start and never thought about leaving. Jennifer, too, settled easily into life at Ignacio. Dave discovered Woolley was "a bigger version" of his private high school, and Mike moved easily from high school to college student government space. Sapo was recruited to Woolley to play basketball, so he had a space waiting for him on campus.

By the time of the study, most participants were well beyond their first semester in college. The descriptions they gave of their friendship groups, athletic teams, musical groups, public service work, campus jobs, connections with faculty or other types of involvement demonstrated the many places students had found to feel a sense of belonging. The pain and frustration they described when they were not able to fit into certain spaces on campus was also evident.

Some students acknowledged the importance of space to their identity development and attributed aspects of their growth to various spaces they occupied. The experience of not fitting into monoracial student groups prompted some students to explore their multiraciality, and the lack of a formal biracial space at Ignacio prompted Phil to begin the process of forming a student organization. Kayla and Dan questioned if they would have done as much thinking about their identities if they had not gone to a school with a visible biracial student community. Summer felt more free to express her biracial identity when she switched friendship groups and moved into an apartment with her new friends. Two-thirds of the participants specifically attributed elements of their growth and development to different aspects of space and to the experience of fitting or not fitting in.

Importance of space in identity development theory

Finding a space to fit in was not just a matter of having people with whom to hang out; the notion of reference groups and immersion in groups of like-others are central to theories of identity development. Traditional models of (monoracial) minority identity development require a stage of immersion in the minority culture (Atkinson, Morten & Sue, 1979; Cross, 1991, 1995; Helms, 1990, 1995). On college campuses, immersion occurs in friendship groups of like-others, in student organizations, and interest housing based on identity. All of these spaces provide

environments in which individuals can explore racial identity and experience racial pride, away from majority group members (Chickering & Associates, 1981). Individuals form meaningful cultural reference groups through this immersion stage and acquire both a personal identity and a reference group orientation (Cross, 1987). Lack of immersion in a reference group or rejection by one's selected reference group inhibits identity formation.

Bi- and multiracial individuals follow a different pattern because they cannot fully immerse themselves in one culture, rejecting all others, without rejecting some aspect of their heritage (Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990; Kerwin-Ponterotto, 1995). The stage theories of biracial identity development do not include an immersion stage because there is generally not a public biracial space to occupy. In these models, racial identity remains more of a private construction. College students, however, can immerse themselves in a public community of multiracial people and acquire a meaningful reference group when such a space is available on campus. Students will not necessarily share the same combination of heritages (a fact noted by several participants in the study), but they share the experience of navigating campus life as multiracial people. This common experience formed the basis for the sense of belonging students felt in Spectrum at Carberry and for the informal network of multiracial students at Ignacio. These students were able to belong to a meaningful reference group of multiracial people.

Participants' patterns in occupying spaces

All of the students described times when they felt like they fit in somewhere on campus, and most had multiple points of connection. The sixteen Nomads moved comfortably across boundaries to belong to a variety of groups, while the eight Nesters established more permanent places of belonging. All of the participants felt like they had some space they fit into in the mainstream culture on their campus. None were isolated in the adjacent AHANA community at Ignacio or outside the mainstream cultures at Carberry or Woolley (where the communities of students of color were located within the general milieu). In this section I will briefly present some of the spaces where students described feeling comfortable and then I will focus on the spaces specific to their experience as multiracial people.

Students described a wide range of spaces in which they felt at home. Across the entire sample, all but four students had found a group of friends in a first-year residence hall and had established a literal space in subsequent living arrangements on or very near campus. David moved into East Asian house as a sophomore, Elektra remained with her first-year roommates through senior year, Phil planned to stay on a multicultural floor, and Mike moved into a cooperative house with friends. BJ, Dave, and Sapo felt like they belonged with their athletic teams, while Audrey, Erika, and David fit in with fellow musicians. Jazz and Vincent found homes among international students. Summer, Marisa, Mike, Dave, and Audrey said that they felt most at home working with faculty in their academic departments. Every participant had at least one group of friends with

whom they socialized and some Nomads described the different sorts of events they attended with different friendship groups. Students listed many other kinds of involvement and places they felt comfortable, but these examples were typical of the group.

I was most concerned with racial identification, and early in the data analysis I identified five ways in which participants occupied spaces on the racial landscape of each campus. These patterns held up across all participants, whether they were Nomads or Nesters on any campus. The five patterns were:

1. Students chose one existing monoracial category ("black," "asian," "latino").

   These were the students like Dee Dee and Mike who identified as black or Sapo who identified as Mexican-American.

2. Students moved between existing monoracial categories (situational definitions of identity).

   In this group, students moved between or among their different heritage groups. BJ felt comfortable with the Filipino Society and with the Black Student Forum. Erika divided her time between her "American" (white) friends and her Japanese friends. Jeff, in joining a predominantly white fraternity and maintaining ties to the Third World community essentially moved between two categories.

3. Students created a new category ("multiracial").

   Elizabeth and Audrey identified as multiracial but did not have a campus base of support for this identity at Woolley, whereas Sina and Julia found a home in Spectrum at Carberry. Though there was no formal space at Ignacio, there was an informal network of mixed race students to which BJ, Phil, Vincent, and Summer belonged.

4. Students opted out completely by deconstructing the category of race or choosing not to identify along U.S. racial lines.

   Kayla presented a theoretical argument against the existence of racial categories and avoided identifying herself in one, and Marisa would not elaborate beyond "Jamaican" when people asked him "What are you?"

5. Students moved between or among the above options (situational definitions of identity that included a multiracial or a no-racial-identity option).

   Like the students who moved between established racial categories (in the second pattern outlined above), students in this position fit into more than one pattern, identifying themselves as required in different situations. In this pattern, they also included multiracial or the "opt out" choice among their identity positions. Alexandra avoided any racial

categorization, but when forced would identify as multiracial and would check off hispanic, asian, and native american on institutional forms. Jazz checked "multiracial" on Woolley's forms but felt most at home with other students from the Middle East. Jeff identified as hapa, a constructed category, but could also fit comfortably with his monoracial asian friends.

Of the existing biracial/multiracial identity development models and theories, these five patterns correspond best to Maria Root's (1996) model of healthy biracial identity development, in which an individual resolves "other" status through one of four "border crossings." She identified these border crossings as 1) having "both feet in both groups" (p. xxi, italics in original) or being able to hold and merge multiple perspective simultaneously; 2) situational ethnicity and race or consciously shifting racial foreground and background in different settings; 3) a decision to sit on the border, claiming a multiracial central reference point; and 4) creating a home base in one identity and making forays into others. These border crossings correspond to the patterns I found among participants as they identified with more than one racial group, identified situationally as monoracial, identified as multiracial, or moved between options.

Eight participants went one step beyond Root's (1996) model by electing to opt out of the racial definitions altogether. Though they could not sustain this position against the forces of institutional bureaucracy and peer culture, there were times when they stood their ground and refused to place themselves into any category defined by race. These students were most likely to attend Carberry, but students from the other institutions also took this position. Dee Dee, Marisa, and Audrey focused on culture as the salient factor, while Kayla, Sina, Jeff, and Kira focused on the deconstruction of race and the fluidity of identity. Alexandra could not explain her position as clearly as the others, but she said that race was not important to how she defined herself even though she recognized that it was important to others.

Notably, three (Audrey, Marisa, and Sina) of the students who spent all or part of their childhood outside the United States were among the group who resisted racial categorization. Their tendency to opt out of racial definitions reinforced the notion that race is a social construction in the United States. The sample size was too small to generalize from this group to all multiracial people with international backgrounds, but it would be worth exploring how international students and immigrants come to see themselves in terms of United States racial categories in further research with a larger sample.

A key element of Root's (1996) theory, like Kich's (1992) biracial identity development model, is the ability of the individual to shift from seeking approval from others to defining him- or herself. All of the participants had made this shift, even though the legitimacy of their chosen self-definitions was sometimes challenged by peers. The eight students who chose sometimes to opt

out of racial definitions were the most extreme case of self-definition, so much so that they denied the validity of race as a defining category.

Despite their ability to define themselves outside of others' expectations, a key factor in how students identified was where they felt like they fit in, which was determined largely by the messages they got from campus peer culture. It was a matter of trying to figure out not only where they could fit in, but also where they felt like they belonged to a group and if that group affirmed their multiracial identity. For example, biracial students could fit in with monoracial groups at Carberry by letting go of their biracial identity in those contexts, which they sometimes chose to do, but to feel like they belonged in a group, they had to find a space where they could maintain their biracial identity. Though theoretically any student could have identified in any of the patterns, the spaces available for multiracial students to identify in different ways varied across the campuses according not only to values espoused by peer culture, but also by the availability of public multiracial spaces. Table 3 on the next page indicates students' identity choices by campus.

At Carberry, multiracial students had a range of options. If they chose to identify monoracially they could fit in with those communities, and four students chose this option at different times. One chose it as her primary identification. If Carberry students wanted to move between existing groups, they could. Only one participant did so. There was a well-established multiracial community available for the seven students who chose to identify that way. There was also intellectual support for the notion of deconstructing the social category of race, which five students did. Seven Carberry students moved among these positions at different points, depending on the given situation.

Though all of the options were available to Carberry students, they were not equally easy to achieve. The rigidity of boundaries around monoracial student communities complicated mobility from one to another. For a biracial student to fit into a monoracial group, he or she had to "leave their biraciality at the door" according to one participant. Students could move from one monoracial group to another, but if they wanted to fit in they had to identify fully with whichever group they were in at the time. Leadership in the multiracial community marked someone as an outsider to a monoracial group and inhibited fully belonging to that group. While they had the greatest number of options among the participants, Carberry students did not have simple access to all identity-based spaces on campus.

Ignacio students had a different pattern. Two chose one existing racial identity, two moved between existing categories, and the remaining four identified sometimes as multiracial and sometimes in an existing category. Only one also seriously challenged the validity of race and tried to opt out of racial definitions. Ignacio students, like their Carberry peers, faced challenges to identifying in different spaces. The division between AHANA students and the general campus milieu presented a barrier to students who would have liked to move in and out of established groups of students of color. Two participants felt like they could, but others felt that strong

Table 3. Participants' choices of racial identity spaces to occupy on campus

	chooses a monoracial space	chooses 2 or more monoracial spaces	chooses a multiracial space	deconstruct race/opt out of spaces	move between/ among options
Carberry					
Dan	X		X		X
David			X		
Dee Dee	X			X	X
Jeff		X	X	X	X
Julia			X		X
Kayla	X		X	X	X
Kira	X		X	X	X
Sina*			X	X	X
	4	**1**	**7**	**5**	**7**
Ignacio					
Alexandra		X	**	X	X
BJ		X	informal		X
Elektra		X	**		
Fred	X				
Jennifer	X		**		
Phil	X		informal		X
Summer		X	informal		X
Vincent*	X		informal		X
	4	**4**	**4 informal, 3 private**	**1**	**5**
Woolley					
Audrey*	X		n/a**	X	X
Dave		X	n/a**		
Elizabeth	X		n/a**		
Erika*		X	n/a**		
Jazz*	X		n/a**		
Marisa*	X		n/a**	X	X
Mike	X		n/a		
Sapo	X		n/a		
	6	**2**	**6 private**	**2**	**2**

*indicates that student spent all or part of childhood outside the United States
**indicates that student privately called her- or himself multiracial but did not have a multiracial space on campus

identification with an AHANA group would cut them off socially from the rest of the campus. The informal network of multiracial students existed in the mainstream campus culture, so students were able to identify as mixed among friends without aligning themselves politically with the AHANA community.

Woolley students identified individually across all positions but did not have the formal or informal space to identify with other multiracial people on campus. Six of the eight identified with a monoracial group on campus, and two moved between two existing groups. In addition, five claimed an individual multiracial identity but had space on campus to identify as such, and one denied the validity of racial construction.

Although they lacked a formal or informal multiracial space, Woolley students experienced less resistance than their peers at Ignacio or Carberry in identifying themselves as biracial or multiracial within the context of monoracial groups. The permeability of group boundaries, as well the location of the community of color within the mainstream campus culture, allowed students to move from one group to another with their identities fairly intact. Although there were incidents of legitimacy testing by monoracial peers, participants reported that the general atmosphere permitted students to fit into different spaces on campus. This was, after all, the school where all eight participants fit the Nomad criteria, moving freely among spaces on campus. In the next section I will discuss the conditions that promoted or inhibited students' ability to flow easily across spaces.

Conditions that promoted or inhibited students' freedom in selecting spaces

Campus-by-campus patterns emerged in students' occupation of space, and they reflected both the availability of certain kinds of spaces as well as the forces of peer culture acting on students when they selected spaces to occupy. The campuses represented different phases in the construction of public space for multiracial identification. Carberry students had a public multiracial space, Ignacio students had an informal network on the brink of creating a formal organization, and Woolley students had only private space to identify as multiracial. In this section I will consider three main factors that influenced the availability of public multiracial space and the likelihood of students occupying it: the size of various student communities, their location, and the permeability of boundaries around groups on campus.

Size

Both the absolute and the relative sizes of the community of color and of the population of multiracial students impacted the development of multiracial space. The first issue was critical mass of students of color. Were there enough on campus to establish a strong community? With 170, 1400, and 1500 students of color at Woolley, Ignacio and Carberry, respectively, there were enough people involved to create and support free-standing communities either within (as at Carberry and Woolley) or beside (as at Ignacio) the general student milieu. These communities were made up of individual ethnic student groups with well-defined boundaries, as well as a strong

ethos of coalition among different groups, especially at Woolley where support for diversity was emphasized. The small absolute size of the population at Woolley also prompted students of color to support one another's activities.

In addition to absolute size of the population of students of color, its size relative to the size of the student body impacted the formation of public space. The percentage of students of color on campus affected the political will and perceived need to maintain separate spaces. At Woolley and Ignacio, where students of color comprised twelve and sixteen percent of the student body, respectively, several students reported the desire to find space on campus that was not predominantly white. Students spoke of being the only person of color in a classroom or in a friendship group, and they talked about their need to be someplace where they did not feel different all the time. Organizations for students of color provided these outlets. At Carberry, about one in three students was a student of color, so the likelihood of isolation was reduced. Students here could, if they wanted, elect to associate almost entirely within the Third World community, unlike the other two schools where the option of shaping one's life to include mostly people of color was far more difficult.

The third issue in the creation of multiracial space was the size of the multiracial population. Was there a critical mass of multiracial individuals on campus willing to create and sustain a public multiracial space? Students at Carberry demonstrated that there was; they had over time maintained a visible and vocal presence in the community of color which had been incorporated into the institutional structures of campus life. They were well-known on campus, and incoming biracial students had easy access to the community, a circumstance that helped sustain its membership and activities. At Woolley, on the other hand, the number of students identifying as multiracial was very small. About 35 students on campus checked "Multiracial" on registration forms, but some of these students were not, in fact, mixed race. It was not clear to me that the population had reached a critical mass for organizing, and few participants indicated that they knew other multiracial students on campus. At Ignacio, the population of multiracial students was large enough that they had created informal networks and begun to take steps to formalize a group. It remained to be seen if enough students would join such a group to keep it going over time, but the sentiment among Ignacio participants was that there probably was a critical mass who would be interested.

Location

Size determined to a great extent whether or not a public community of color or a multiracial space existed, but location of that space was also a feature in students' decisions to occupy particular spaces. At Woolley and Carberry, the communities of students of color/Third World students were located within the general campus milieu. Electing to participate in these public spaces did not mean leaving the general peer culture. At Ignacio, however, joining the AHANA community meant leaving the mainstream peer culture. It was interpreted as a decision to reject the general milieu in favor of "self-segregation." An Ignacio student had more at stake in

entering an AHANA space than a Woolley or Carberry student had in joining activities in the community of color; entering an AHANA space meant leaving the general milieu behind (see Figure 1 on page 9). The impact of this separation on students' desire to join a multiracial student organization was not known, but some students believed it would inhibit some people's participation in such a group if it were founded as part of the AHANA community.

Permeability

In addition to size and location of communities of color, permeability of boundaries around these communities was the final factor in determining which spaces students would choose to occupy. Peer culture at Woolley supported the most permeable boundaries of the three campuses. Students moved among social groups easily and were not considered "outsiders" because of participation in certain activities. Though they did not have a formal multiracial space on campus, the borders around identity-based student groups allowed them to enter without abandoning their privately-held, and sometimes publicly expressed, multiracial identities.

Boundaries were less permeable at Ignacio, primarily the border between AHANA and the general milieu. Students found that they could easily join the AHANA groups, but once they did they could not bring their AHANA identities back into the mainstream. The boundary was permeable in one direction only. Once in the AHANA community, multiracial students found more stringent borders around the individual groups; being part of the general AHANA community was easier than being part of a specific ethnic group.

Of all participants, Carberry students encountered the most rigid boundaries around individual ethnic student organizations. The absolute size of these groups was large enough to allow them to erect borders impermeable to anyone who did not meet the identity-based criteria. Unlike their peers at Woolley, they did not need to accept everyone who wanted to join their organization. Furthermore, identification as a Third World student required legitimacy in the eyes of peers. Any non-white student was considered a student of color, but to enter the Third World space one had to demonstrate one's commitment to its political and social ideals. It was the opposite of the situation at Ignacio: students could easily move out of the Third World space into the rest of the general milieu at Carberry, but getting into the space required proof of legitimacy. On the other hand, Spectrum's borders were more loosely constructed and students felt like they could move in and out of the group however they identified at a certain time. They attributed this permeability to multiracial students' shared sense of exclusion from monoracial groups and their consequent desire to create an inclusive community on campus.

Other findings of note

In addition to the meaning and importance of space, other important themes that emerged from the data, but which are outside the scope of this paper, were the specific person-environment interactions at college that contributed to racial identity development. Through academic work,

involvement in activities, friendship groups, and social/dating situations, participants changed their ideas about race and culture, as well as their ideas about their own identity. Family background, pre-college life, and international experience before or during college also emerged as important elements in identity development. Public and private spaces featured prominently in these data. Applying Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993) ecology model of cognitive development to the data, I created an ecology model of multiracial identity development that included all of the person-environment interactions students' described as influencing their sense of themselves as multiracial people.

Summary of findings

Public space was important to students' private construction of multiracial identity. Size, location and permeability of student communities acted together to influence the types of space available to students and the freedom they felt to choose among them. The demographics of an institution determined the absolute size of the populations of students of color and multiracial students, as well as their sizes relative to the student body as a whole. Peer culture was the key determinant of the location and permeability of the spaces students of color created.

The creation of a public multiracial space required a critical mass of students both willing to identify as such and feeling a need for a separate multiracial space. Carberry had both. Woolley seemed to lack critical mass, but students also did not express a need to create a separate space because they were already able to carry their multiracial identities into existing spaces. At Ignacio, an informal, private network had developed in response to the need to have a space for multiracial students, but it remained to be seen if enough students would be willing to identify as such–and risk being seen as AHANA outsiders to the general milieu–in order to create a formal organization.

The combination of demographic factors (absolute and relative numbers of students of color in general and multiracial students in particular) and peer culture had a powerful impact on the experience of multiracial students. If we believe that students benefit from maximum freedom to experience and participate in different identity-based spaces, then we can use information about how students move in and out of communities on campus to consider whether or not individual institutions or higher education as a whole are meeting the needs of multiracial students and others. In the next section, I will undertake such consideration as well as indicate future research directions in the areas of multiracial students, constructed identities, and developmental ecologies.

Implications for Higher Education

This study demonstrates the importance to students of having a space on campus and examines several factors that contribute to students' freedom in selecting spaces on campus. Given the importance in student development and racial identity development theory of having a group of like-others with whom to affiliate, the inability of most multiracial students to find such a group is

cause for concern. In having an established multiracial student group, Carberry is an exception; only a few dozen campuses currently have these groups. As the number of multiracial students in higher education increases, these student groups may proliferate, but for now, most multiracial students are left on their own to negotiate highly racialized campus climates. Administrative and faculty attention to the concerns of multiracial students, as well as to the campus racial climate as a whole, may help multiracial students find places on campus where they can try on different identities and find identity-based spaces that suit them.

At a time when we hear calls for an end to "balkanization" and "self-segregation" of identity-based groups on campus, this study speaks to the need to create and maintain spaces where students can explore their heritages and experiences as racialized people, but it also speaks to the need for increased cross-racial dialogue on the issues of race, ethnicity, and identity. Several participants noted that students of color did not discuss racial issues with white students; multiracial students were caught in between, unable to discuss issues with white students or with monoracial students of color, who generally denied the authenticity of the biracial students' experience. Campus leaders can continue to provide programs and services for various identity-based groups while aggressively promoting cross-racial dialogue about race and race relations on campus. This study points to residential living arrangements as one specific arena in which cross-cultural relationships are fostered, and the literature on residential life may be useful in developing programs and policy toward this end.

In addition to emphasizing the importance of identity-based spaces on campus, the results of this study raise the issue of college curricula in students' identity development. One of the main differences between the Carberry cohort and those at Ignacio and Woolley was the way in which Carberry students used postmodern theory to explain aspects of race and racial identity. Five of the eight sometimes occupied the "opts out of spaces/deconstructs race" space (see Table 3) whereas only one Ignacio student and two Woolley students saw this option as available and desirable. The connection between access to theory and possible identities is strong; more students at Ignacio and Woolley might have elected the "opts out/deconstructs race" identity position if they had been aware of current theories about race as a social construction. The Carberry cohort, like the students in the pilot study (Renn, 1997), both described an academic atmosphere replete with the jargon of postmodernism and utilized deconstructionist language during the interviews and focus groups. Access to the theory and language of postmodernism, as well as peer support for engaging in deconstruction of social categories, gave Carberry students easier access to ways of thinking about themselves and their identities than was available to Ignacio and Woolley students. Biracial identity theorists (Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990) describe the cognitive flexibility required to sustain a biracial identity, and college curricula addressing the social construction of racial categories could be a powerful means for students to acquire some of this flexibility.

This study also suggests some additions to graduate preparation curricula in higher education administration. In addition to traditional student development theories, graduate students need to understand how postmodern thinking has permeated the social sciences and offers new perspectives from which to consider the development of identity and community on campus. New professionals should be aware of the growing presence of multiracial students in higher education and of the ways in which services and programs designed for (monoracial) students of color may not meet the needs of biracial and multiracial individuals.

On a broader scale, the issue of biracial students on campus collides with current developments in affirmative action policy. How will we "count" biracial students? Will we consider them as monoracial blacks, asians, latinos? What if they refuse to "check one box only"? Will we decide for them? Participants frequently expressed skepticism about the administrative manipulation of demographic data used to categorize multiracial people. Students who sometimes chose to "opt out" of identifying along U.S. racial lines pointed out the arbitrary nature of racial categorization and the therefore arbitrary nature of racial quotas in college admissions policy; they also acknowledged the non-arbitrary nature of racism in the educational system. Caught between their postmodern view of racial construction and their experience as people of color in a racist society, they were unable to theorize away or ignore challenges to affirmative action policy. As one student said, "I know that race isn't real, but racism is." In any case, as higher education leaders continue to struggle with issues of access, equity, and affirmative action, they will have to deal with more and more students who do not fit neatly into pre-determined racial categories. Studies such as this one provide important information for institutional and system-wide decision makers.

Limitations of this study

The two major limitations of this study are the nature of the sample and the impact of my own identity. Sampling bias is likely to occur when participants self-select for a study, as they did for this one. Students of multiracial heritage who did not identity as such were unlikely to volunteer to participate, and some may not have know about the project. I invited one biracial student (Dee Dee) whom I knew identified as monoracial, but did not have access to others.

Another limiting aspect of the sample population was that the three sites were, by design, similar in nature (predominantly white, residential, undergraduate emphasis, selective, etc.). Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of the group is their membership among the nation's more (or most) prestigious private institutions. Most college students in the United States do not attend schools like these. Embedded in this limiting aspect is the issue of socioeconomic class and access to higher education. Although I analyzed class as a factor of identity development, the implications of class background on the study of multiracial college students are not known. The results of this study may not generalize well beyond the peer institutions of Carberry, Ignacio,

and Woolley, and though generalizability is not usually an explicit goal of qualitative research, it will be important to know how useful the results of this study might be across institutional types.

My own racial identity–as a monoracial white woman–also limits the study. A few students asked about my racial identity, others asked why I was interested in the topic. My physical appearance suggests (correctly) that I am monoracial and white. Whether students knew by asking or surmised by looking, my whiteness may have affected the way they answered questions in the interview, wrote their responses, or talked with one another in focus groups. Though I could not change the impact of my identity on the data collected, I did attempt to learn how my identity affected my analysis and interpretation of results. In order to see how someone who was biracial might understand the data, I asked a biracial colleague familiar with qualitative research and with identity development theory to code two transcripts and a written response. I also asked a multiracial Carberry undergraduate who was not involved in the study to code two transcripts from interviews at other campuses. I learned that I was substantially in agreement with my coding consultants and adjusted my coding slightly. After I had coded and analyzed data, I presented preliminary results to study participants for their feedback in the focus groups. I found again that I was substantially in agreement with participant feedback. The coding consultations and member checks could not eliminate all bias on my part, but I believe that they helped correct for some of it.

Areas for future research

This study provides a window into the experience of multiracial students at three particular institutions. It builds on the multiracial identity development literature and fills a gap in college student development literature. It does not claim to represent the lives of all multiracial students, but it raises issues and questions that transcend institutional boundaries: How do students choose, create, and occupy public space on campus? How does peer culture mediate these choices? How will higher education address the growing numbers of multiracial people on campus through programs, services, and policies? There is still much to learn about the lives of multiracial students, about identity construction in college, and about the use of racial categories in higher education.

Toward that end, I suggest a broadening of the research sample to include students at public, two-year, rural, single-sex, and historically black, latina/o, or native american serving institutions. Because the history of racial dynamics varies by geographic region in the United States, exploration of multiracial construction at colleges outside the Northeast would be an important contribution. The on-campus construction of identities based on gender, class, and sexuality bear more exploration, especially when students' identities do not fit into pre-determined categories. How these students create and claim space is not well understood.

The student development literature would benefit from further research on how peer culture impacts students' individual identity choices, including how patterns of Nesters and Nomads emerge on campus. The field would also benefit from some overarching theory, such as

Bronfenbrenner's ecology theory, that could unify existing theories and provide a framework for the introduction of postmodern, context-based identity development models.

Finally, this study indicates the need for further research in the area of institutional policy. Currently there are national statistics on multiracial college students, though the use of the "check all that apply" standard on the upcoming census may prompt more institutions to gather data this way. Even so, there is strong evidence that all, or even most, mixed race students will indicate all of their racial heritages on institutional forms. How do institutions treat multiracial individuals in the ever-important counting of racialized bodies on campus? How do affirmative action policies, racial quotas, and race-based scholarship programs treat multiracial students? Are services for (ostensibly) monoracial students of color equally available for multiracial students who have white heritage? As the number of multiracial college students grows, these questions will become increasingly important at all institutions, but especially at those, like the institutions of the California public higher education system, that are likely to enroll significant numbers of multiracial students. Advance research and consideration of these issues could prepare policy makers for the decisions they will soon face.

The results of this research point in a number of directions for future study in higher education, multiracial issues, and issues of race and multiraciality in higher education. From analyzing individual campus climates to considering systemic use of racial data, the experiences of participants in this study speak to the need to think broadly about the construction of race in higher education and to challenge the notion of race as a rigid, immutable category. Continued research in the area of multiraciality and higher education will help us do both.

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